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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

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## Editorial

### WORLD-WIDE EVANGELISM

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Then when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

### THE AMBITION OF THE EARLY MISSIONARIES

It was an important moment in the history of the Christian church when Barnabas and Saul, soon to be known as Paul and Barnabas, set out westward from Antioch. It was not then for the first time that Paul had conceived the hope of being himself the bearer of the gospel to the Gentiles. This thought had in all probability been in his mind almost from the moment of his acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God. But the time had now come when he could definitely, and with the support and sympathy of a Christian community, enter upon the task. A few years later he wrote from Corinth to the Romans that he had fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum, that is, had completed his work in Syria, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia, and though temporarily compelled to go to Jerusalem, was looking with hope and longing to Rome and Spain. From the point of view of that later hour, it is evident that the planting of the gospel in the centers of population and influence in the Roman empire was the task which the two apostles began when they sailed from Antioch, and it is scarcely possible to doubt that, in the mind of Paul at least, the thought and hope of this achievement were already at that time kindled in his heart. It was with a large

ambition—in the eyes of Jew, Greek, and Roman, a foolish ambition—that the two young apostles crossed the strip of water between Syria and Cyprus. But it was ambition that the ultimate outcome of their efforts has more than justified.

#### THE BASIS OF THIS AMBITION

If we seek the explanation of this daring ambition and the courage to undertake its realization, we find it in three facts.

The explanation lies first in the broad horizon of Paul's thought. Professor Ramsay has rightly directed our attention to the fact that Paul was an imperialist in feeling. He was a Roman citizen, and thought not of Jerusalem or of Tarsus, not of Judea or of Cilicia, as his country, but of the Roman empire. To him it was natural in formulating his plan for the spread of the gospel to define its scope in terms of the empire, and to set no limit to it but those of the empire.

The explanation lies, secondly, in the fact that the apostle's experience had led him to leave behind many of the elements of the ancient Jewish religion which both to the Jewish particularist, and the Jerusalem type of Christian were essential, but which to the Greek and the Roman were serious obstacles to their acceptance of either Judaism or Christianity. The controversy centered at a later time largely around the question of circumcision. But before he left Antioch Paul had already settled that question in his own mind, and with it had decided the much larger question of the authority of ancient statutes in general which were no longer conducive to the development of moral and religious life. For him new occasions gave rise to new duties, and new experiences emancipated from old obligations. Old convictions based on ancient revelation could never become contemptible, but neither could they hold the field or bind the conscience as against new convictions based on deep and convincing, even though modern, experience. Religion is not rites and ceremonies; it is not statutes and commands: it is the open mind, and the ready will; it is faith in God revealed in Christ, begetting love toward men. Now abide faith, hope, and love. All else is but expression of these, and may change with changing needs.

The explanation of the apostle's ambition is found, in the third place, in an intense conviction of the power of the gospel when thus reduced to its simple terms. He was not ashamed of the gospel; for he was fully persuaded that it was the power of God unto salvation for every one that believed. In the laboratory of an intense religious experience he had wrought out for himself certain fundamental and unshakable convictions. Converted by his Damascus vision from a zealous Phariseism to a firm faith in Jesus, from a rigid legalism to a joyous life by the Spirit, he had confirmed the new conviction of that crucial hour by years of devout faith in Christ bearing fruit in the arduous toil of love, and by long observation of the effects of his gospel in the lives of others.

#### THE BROAD HORIZON OF MODERN CHRISTIANITY

Looking out upon our world at the beginning of another new year, is it fanciful for us to find a parallel between Paul's situation and ours? Commerce and navigation, the telegraph and the cable, the missionary and the world traveler, have given us also a wide horizon. Indeed, we have almost reached the limit of possibility in this direction. Future generations may reach the south pole as this one has reached the north, they may extend their explorations, their railways and steamship lines, into territory now only imperfectly accessible, they may learn to sail the air as now we sail the seas. But no new continents can be discovered, the earth cannot be enlarged, nor can other planets be reached by steamship or railway. We have practically reached the end of the process of enlarging our horizon.

#### THE SHORTENING OF ITS CREED

The progress of biblical and theological science has tended to reduce the extent of our theological creed. Much that previous generations thought essential we are beginning to learn is not vital, and to suspect that insistence upon it hinders the spread of our religion among the nations of the earth. Indeed it is becoming constantly more evident that many of the things which have been obstacles to the acceptance of Christianity by non-Christian peoples are hindrances also to its effectiveness at home. The shortening of

creed, which Jesus and Paul found so necessary in their day, is not less needful in ours.

THE PARAMOUNT NEED: POSITIVE FAITH

But what shall we say concerning the third element that gave to Paul and Barnabas the courage to enter upon their world-horized enterprise: intensity of positive conviction? For if we are to rank any one of the three grounds of their ambition above the other two, it is this that must be reckoned most essential. Unfortunately it sometimes happens that the surrender of the untrue or the doubtful begets a habit of surrender that leaves one without deep or strong convictions, and consequently without enthusiasm. It was not so with Paul. It need not be so, it must not be so, with this generation. There is ample ground for faith in the eternal truths that stand forth only the more clearly when they are unencumbered by doctrines that have been superseded by larger truth. There is ample reason in past experience and in that of the present for firm conviction and enthusiastic devotion to high tasks. With horizon enlarged to its utmost limits, with all the nations brought within the field of our vision and of our efforts, with clearer light by which to discriminate between the basal truths that abide and the temporary expression of this truth in relation to passing circumstances and needs, the times call for, and the facts warrant, a positive and enthusiastic faith, a zealous and at the same time a rational evangelism.

It is the positive truths that we hold, moreover, that will be effective. It was not the armor that David rejected that won him his victory; it was the weapon and the strength that he retained. It is not the encumbering cloak that the woodman throws aside that enables him to fell the mighty tree; it is his strong arm and his keen-edged axe. What we have happily freed ourselves from, others may need our help to lay aside. But it is truth retained, not what is rejected, that nourishes the soul and makes strong the arm. Faith in and fellowship with the living and true God, revealed through Jesus Christ, and that love for our fellow-men which such faith begets—these are positives, not negatives, and they are the central elements of the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation for Jew and Gentile alike.